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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 004186

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LONDON FOR TSOU
STATE FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2015

TAGS: PGOV KDEM KMPI PREL SOCI KU

SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: COMMERCE MINISTER IDENTIFIES
ELECTORAL DISTRICTS, THE PRESS, AND POLITICAL PARTIES AS
PRIORITY FOR REFORM

REF: STATE 152818

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) During a September 24 meeting with Minister of Commerce Abdullah Al-Taweel, the Ambassador asked Al-Taweel for his views on next steps in political reform. Al-Taweel said that, in his opinion, the top priority should be changes to the electoral constituencies in order to increase district sizes. "The lower (the) number of districts the better," he said, adding that the current parliament had become "all about personal conflict now." Al-Taweel said that ten districts was the current number being considered. (Note: For parliamentary elections, there are currently 25 districts with some members elected by as few as 1,000 voters. End Note.)

¶2. (C) Al-Taweel identified the new press and publications law as the second most important reform priority, saying that, while people are allowed to express their opinions in the current Kuwait media climate, there should not be any government controls over the media at all. A free and unfettered press is "important for democratizing Kuwait," he added.

¶3. (C) The third top priority for the GOK's reform agenda should be the introduction of political parties, according to Al-Taweel. Without political parties, he said, the National Assembly will remain a hotbed of personal conflicts. Describing the need to further the political discussion and the public discourse, Al-Taweel stated that "We need to elect agendas, not individuals."

¶4. (C) Comment: Al-Taweel is considered one of the more progressive ministers, and he has come under attack at times by Islamist legislators, most recently being the target of criticism for price inflation in Kuwait. Without prodding, Al-Taweel focused on the same democratization and reform priorities identified by Post and included in the Freedom Agenda (reftel.) End Comment.

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